STUDIES IN THE STRUCTURE
OF THE
MINOR ENGLISH RENAISSANCE EPICS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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LEWIS F. BALL

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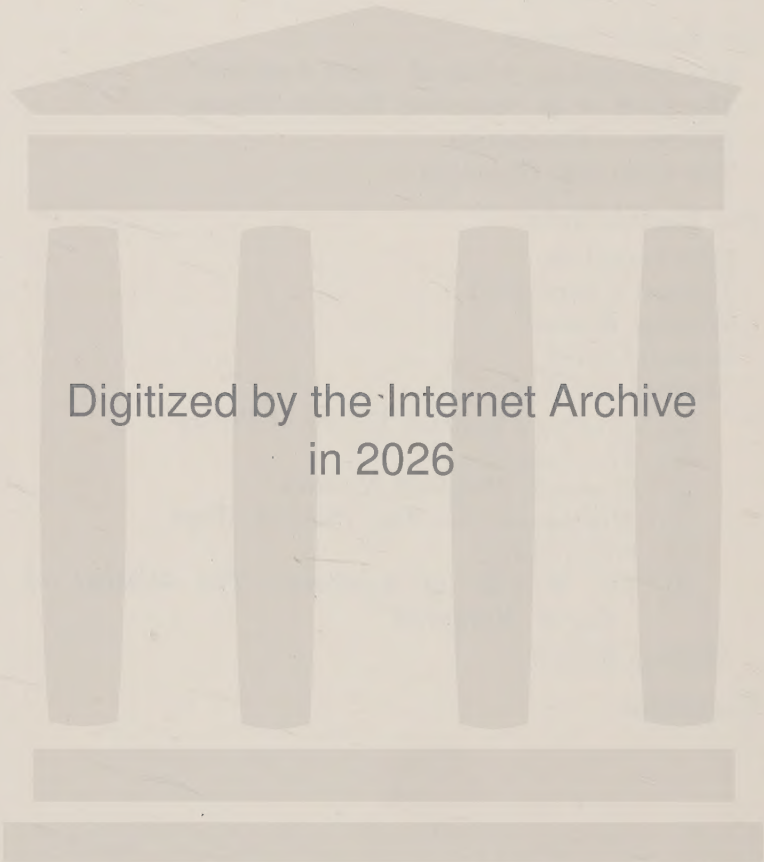
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THE BACKGROUND OF THE MINOR ENGLISH RENAISSANCE EPICS

By Lewis F. Ball

I

In Mr. W. M. Dixon's *English Epic and Heroic Poetry* [1] we find a typical judgment on the Elizabethan epic: namely, that none appeared, although the time was eminently propitious for their growth; or rather, runs the account, they appeared in a form hitherto unknown in literary annals—the chronicle play. Further along in the same chapter, there occurs a remark which cannot be passed over without comment:

> To extend the term "epic" to the *strange Herculean toil* of the *Polyolbion* might fairly be declared the final stroke, the *coup de grâce* which deprives it of all meaning. If "*a versified gazetteer,*" even though a work of genius, be epic, there is an end to sense in literary criticism.[2]

Such an attitude seems to be general and very few literary historians or critics are inclined to consider the longer poems of Drayton, Warner, Daniel, and others as epics. If they do condescend to use the term, they are usually careful enough to enclose it in quotation marks. It is my object in this article to show that such poems as *Poly-Olbion, Albions England,* and the *Civill Warres* should be regarded as epics on the basis of classical and Renaissance theory and practice, and that they were actually considered as such by the Elizabethans.

With the "regular" epics like the *Iliad,* the *Aeneid,* and the later *Italia Liberata dai Goti* of Trissino we are not concerned except as a basis for comparison. What is often overlooked is the fact that contemporaneous with the great epics of antiquity there were other poems which did not conform with the so-called rules of Aristotle and imitated the spirit rather than the form of their models. As an example of the more liberal spirit in Latin criticism, Quintilian might be cited. He censures those who copy form alone and urges one to return again and again

[1] In the "Channels of English Literature" series, p. 172.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 185.

to a passage and reconsider it with care for it " must not be committed to the memory for subsequent imitation while it is still in a crude state." [3] Elsewhere he inclines toward a belief in inspiration in speaking of Plato, who, he says, " mihi non hominis ingenio sed quodam Delphici videatur oraculo dei instinctus." [4] The fact that he is here speaking of the training of the orator, primarily, does not detract from the broadness of his theories, nor invalidate his influence. The point is that Quintilian places the emphasis upon an absorption of the true essence of the model. From this position it is only one more step to the selection of the dominant feature of the original as a basis for imitation—the patriotic element of the epic, for instance.

Even though the Greek and Roman critics failed to give due recognition to the patriotic aspects of epic poetry, these features were obvious in the poems themselves, and in Ennius and Virgil were dominant. The *Annales* of the former is one of the most interesting monuments. Based partly on legendary accounts, it attempted to recount the story of Rome from its founding to the author's own day. It aimed to present Rome's Trojan background and her destiny as mistress of the world, all in a serious work of real magnitude. The work will not stand up under Aristotelian canons; it is not a complete, well-fused whole; it has a beginning and a middle, but no end. In short, it is a chronicle. But Ennius recognized his own kinship with Homer and so did his countrymen if we are to believe Horace who refers to him as, " Ennius, et sapiens et fortis, et alter Homerus, Ut critici dicunt." [5]

The epic road, however, had been trod by others than Homer. In about the third century B. C. there was a considerable vogue for writing " little epics " dealing with local history, among the small towns and islands of Greece and also among the scattered communities of Italy. In the same century Livius Andronicus translated the *Odyssey* and a little later Naevius combined annals and poetry in his *Bellum Punicum*. In the next century we have Hostius's *Bellum Istricum*, Furius Bibaculus' *Bellum Gallicum*, and other minor epic compositions. The same com-

[3] *Inst. Orat.* 10. 1. 19.
[4] *Ibid.*, 10. 1. 81.
[5] *Epis.* 2. 1. 50-1. See also Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* 10. 1. 88.

bination of the annalist, the patriot, and the poet is present in all.

The movement, of course, culminated in Virgil, who, scorning to copy Homer slavishly, or simply to versify the chronicles, gave permanent literary form to legendary history in his *Aeneid*. The poem exalts the ruler Augustus Caesar and the leading Roman families—the Sergii, the Memmii, and the Cluentii—glorifies the story of Rome's Trojan ancestry, and is truly epic in every sense. Virgil differs from Homer in having placed the gods in the background of the action and in having dwelt principally upon the more refined and gentle attributes of the hero, the " pius Aeneas," in whom are centred the spirit of Rome and a philosophy of life. Both the patriotism and the philosophy are decidedly more obtrusive than in Homer.

After Virgil there is a marked decadence in the epic. Ovid, in the first Christian century, is typical, his *Metamorphoses* being a mixture of mythology and history from the creation to the death of Caesar, whose ancestry is celebrated. Other significant figures are Lucan, Silius Italicus, and Statius, and much later, in the fourth century, Rutilius Namatianus, the author of the celebrated *Itinerary*. All these poems are decidedly loose in structure; they have no hero in the generally accepted sense; they emphasize strongly nationalistic features; and they usually (Ovid being a notable exception) prefer to rely upon authentic historical material for their subject matter.

II

The borrowings of phrase and incident by Spenser and his contemporaries from the Italians have been repeatedly stressed and are for the most part relatively easy to discover.[6] As for the pilferings from the Italian critical writers, it is another story. So many of the Italian critics plagiarized from one another that it is very difficult to establish a definite source for the English ideas. Furthermore as Gregory Smith warns,[7] even when the English writers " confess " their source, they may be indicating

[6] See Mr. Edward G. Ainsworth, Jr., *The 'Orlando Furioso' in English Literature before 1640*, a Cornell Univ. Thesis (1929); also R. E. N. Dodge, "Spenser's Imitations from Ariosto," *PMLA* 12, pp. 151-204; and J. Schoembs, *Ariosts Orlando Furioso in der Engl. Litt. des Zeitalters der Elizabeth*, Soden, 1898.

[7] *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Introd., p. lxxvii.

personal preference only, or perhaps a recent perusal of the alleged source without its having sunk very deeply into their critical system. Undoubtedly, too, such references were often made as a display of erudition. In any event, the general debt is clear and most of the Elizabethan criticism has its basis somewhere among the Italians. Smith suggests that it would be the most natural procedure for the English to turn to the Italians since it was from the latter that " they had drawn their formal experience, and in which the principles of the art of writing had already been fully discussed." [8] From here he goes on to enumerate examples of borrowing by Daniel, Sidney, Harington, and others from Minturno, Scaliger, Cintio, and Trissino. All this is significant, but the details seem never to have permeated the English practice very thoroughly. The Italian concern over the minor points of their native vocabulary and grammar and their minute elaboration of strict classical canon were, to a great degree, beyond the sphere of English interest.

Out of the complicated maze of Italian epic theory, there emerge two discussions which have an important bearing upon the English poems: the problem of the unity of action, and the conception of the universality of the epic genre. The first of these questions is intimately connected with the disputes over the " romanzi," and particularly over the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto. The unity of action was insisted upon by Aristotle and likewise by most of the Italian critics with the exception of Castelvetro. One must remember, though, that there were almost as many varieties of " unity " as there were commentators.

Castelvetro reverses the conventional order of importance, making the unities of time and place necessary, with that of action being simply an inevitable consequence of their observance; however, this unity of action of his is of a different sort from what is usually understood by the term. In the accepted sense, it is not unity at all. Even in the drama, where a narrower interpretation may be necessary because of the limitation of dramatic exigencies there must be two actions—that is, one principal and one secondary plot. But in the epic, where material conditions do not impose such limitation, there may be " not only one action, but many and much longer ones,

[8] *Ibid.*, p. lxxxii.

which, however, have happened in different lands." The epic permits multiplicity of action and may do whatever history does without blame. Poetry may narrate one action of a whole race, or many actions of a whole race, and even many actions of many men or of many races. On the other hand, although the plot of the epic does not of necessity comprise only one action of one person, the more nearly it does so, the clearer will be the demonstration of the skill of the poet.[9]

The opinion that poetry may be allowed to do anything that history may do is reminiscent of a passage in Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetics*, in which he argues that Lucan was a true poet despite his historical manner.[10] Scaliger was sufficiently well known in England for his opinions to have immediate significance.

Castelvetro's concept of unity of action is interesting in reference to the long and involved controversy over "epic and romance." Boiardo's romantic *Orlando Innamorato* (1495) was largely responsible for starting the trouble. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, continuing Boiardo's story, made things worse, and then the storm broke to divide the critics into opposing camps. The fact is, both poems had been written before Aristotelianism had dominated Italian criticism, and so when it was found that they would not fit the rules the critics were faced with a dilemma: whether, on the one hand, to stand by Aristotle; or, on the other, to admit that these romantic poems constituted a legitimate form of the heroic poem.

According to Professor Spingarn,[11] the first able volunteer in the cause of the romances was Giraldi Cintio (*Discorso Intorno al Comporre dei Romanzi*, 1549). His defense maintains that Aristotle was unacquainted with the romance and that therefore his rules did not apply; furthermore, that Italian literature differs fundamentally from Greek and consequently ought to follow its own development and not superimposed classical laws. He declares that it is the purpose of heroic poetry to instruct through the imitation of worthy deeds, and that there are three

[9] See H. B. Charlton, *Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry*, Manchester, 1913, chapter 6, pp. 83-94.

[10] *Poetices Libri Septem* (editio quarta), 1607, 1. 2. 11. For English translation see Professor F. M. Padelford, *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics*, p. 17.

[11] *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, pp. 112 ff.

types of heroic poetry: first, the epic poem as treated in the *Poetics* of the Stagirite, imitating a single action of a single hero; second, the romantic poem, treating of numerous actions of various men; and finally, the biographical poem, relating the life of a single hero.

Parts of this defense sound peculiarly like Daniel's eloquent statement:

> Me thinks we should not so soone yeeld our consents captive to the authoritie of Antiquitie, unlesse we saw more reason: all our understandings are not to be built by the square of *Greece* and *Italie*. We are the children of nature as well as they, we are not so placed out of the way of judgement, but that the same Sunne of Discretion shineth upon us; we have our portion of the same vertues as well as of the same vices.[12]

When such deviations from Aristotle are countenanced, it will be seen that it is only one more step to justify the whole action of a whole race as a suitable subject for epic treatment. That Warner, Drayton, and Slatyer (*Palae-albion*) did write such poems should, then, appear less surprising.

Pigna's *I Romanzi* (1554) follows substantially the same lines as Cintio's work, but differs in asserting that Ariosto really followed classic models and used Aristotle as a guide. Tasso's *Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica* (1556) maintains that in a poem two sorts of unity are possible, the simple unity of a chemical element or the more complicated or " organic " unity of a living being. He recommends following the latter type. In his remarks explaining the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tasso took pains to justify imaginative literature by claiming his poem, as heroic poetry should, combined imitation and allegory, the first to delight, and the second to instruct; and then he proceeds to explain the allegory of his own work. This emphasis upon allegory is somewhat surprising. We know that Homer did not write in hidden symbols and that Virgil intended less symbolic interpretation than the Middle Ages thought he did. The *Iliad*, in common with the true primitive epic like *Beowulf*, does not rely upon allegory; hence Tasso's insistence upon it is of twofold significance. It helped to justify poetry as a learning, and

[12] *A Defence of Ryme*, in *Works*, ed. Grosart, vol. 4, p. 46. In this and in all other quotations the Elizabethan spellings with i, j, u, and v have been normalized to conform with modern usage.

it indicates a changed emphasis upon the ingredients of heroic poetry. Later, in England, the all-important ingredient was to be the patriotic.

Giangiorgio Trissino, whose *Italia Liberata* is one of the most uninspired performances ever to come to light, renders abject lip-service to Homer and to Aristotle, but even he cites Boccaccio's *Decameron* as an example of the unity of action, since he considers it sufficiently tied together by the artificial framework.[13] From another point of view Trissino reflects one of the main Renaissance doctrines—the belief that heroic poetry must possess magnitude, that it was the most comprehensive and universal of all the genres. His plan to include in his *Italia Liberata* the story of the whole war may be viewed as a reflection of the desire to create an atmosphere of epic magnitude, and his frequent digressions throughout the poem, describing the ancient arms and dress, as an attempt to re-create a complete picture of antiquity. His *Poetics*, too, is replete with the idea of epic comprehensiveness.

Scaliger, distinguishing the divisions of poetry, writes:

> Antiquissimum, pastorale; proximum, comicum; e quo natum tragicum: mistum autem epicum, quod idcirco omnium est princeps, quia continet materias universas.[14]

Daniello emphasized the fact that the epic permitted the treatment of not only the deeds of men, but also the truths of God and nature. Spingarn cites Muzio's lines on the vastness of design suitable for the epic poem:

> Il poema sovrano è una pittura
> De l'universo, e però in sè comprende
> Ogni stilo, ogni forma, ogni ritratto.[15]

In this belief in the catholicity of subject-matter nearly all the Italians of the *Cinquecento* seem to concur.

Anyone acquainted with English literary history can trace the way in which most of the "romanticisms" grew out of weaknesses inherent in the very heart of neo-classicism, and

[13] Trissino, *Tutte le Opere*, Verona, 1729, p. 97. See also Dr. R. C. Williams, *The Theory of the Heroic Epic in Italian Criticism of the Sixteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins Dissertation), 1917, pp. 14 and 21.

[14] *Op. cit.*, 1. 2. 13. Quoted in part by Charlton, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[15] Spingarn, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

how this in turn developed from the Renaissance. In a somewhat similar way there emerged from the Aristotelian " rules " various liberal interpretations of unity and of the matter admissible into the epic. So disguised are many of these commentaries that their original is unrecognizable. I have remarked on the entrance of allegory as an essential of heroic poetry in Tasso's theory and the universally accepted opinion that the epic must deal with great things in the grand manner. Now if these points are kept clearly before us, we can see the bases for much of the form—or formlessness, if one prefers—of the Elizabethan epic. For in *Poly-Olbion*, for instance, we have a poem with the greatest scope and the largest action, a poem without a hero and emphasizing the historical and patriotic instead of the allegorical.

III

If the Italians made a habit of importing their epic heroes, the French made up for it by their strong nationalistic leanings, crystallized in the Pleiad. This group, composed of Du Bellay, Ronsard, Baïf, Belleau, Pontus de Thyard, Jodelle, and Daurat, is significant chiefly because of the first two mentioned; Du Bellay because of his *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549), and Ronsard for his several treatises on the poetic art and the epic *Franciade* (1572). The Pleiad presents a curious mixture of a dependence upon the classic and Italian models and strong emphasis upon inspiration and originality. In other words, the real poet must condescend to studious application, but without the divine spark his efforts cannot succeed.

Most of the theories of the Pleiad may be found in Du Bellay's *Deffence*, a work which Lanson has called " at once a pamphlet, a defense, and an art of poetry." The first book is concerned primarily with theories of language. In a passage based upon Quintilian, the author pleads for the perfection of his native tongue, urges the accomplishment of this ideal through judicious imitation, and decries those

> qui sans penetrer aux plus cachées, et interieures parties de l'Aucteur qu'ilz se sont proposé, s'adaptent seulement au premier Regard, et s'amusant à la beauté des Motz, perdent la force des choses.[16]

[16] *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse*, ed. Em. Person, Paris, 1878, p. 72. See also M. Person's note on this passage.

The second part of the work deals with poetic genres and with the character of the poet. Du Bellay exhorts poets to leave off writing insignificant jingles and to imitate the ancients. Finally, one who is suited for the task should write a "long Poëme Francoys." We find that in chapters v-ix of the second book he gives explicit suggestions for its composition and that his most eloquent passages are on this subject. The author of such a project would have to be erudite, and he must not be discouraged by the magnitude of his task; he should go to the old French chronicles for his background. The completed work, says Bellay, would redound to one's immortal glory and the honor of France, and would be a magnificent illustration of what the language could accomplish. It would, moreover, learnedly instruct and hence be of infinitely greater value than the popular amplification and paraphrasing of the romances to entertain young demoiselles.

Of less intrinsic importance is the *Art Poétique* of Jacques Peletier du Mans, published in 1555. It is written in a spirit similar to that of the *Deffence* and many ideas are common to both it and Ronsard's treatises. The first chapter or so deals with the antiquity and excellence of poetry, offers a comparison between the orator and the poet and finally declares that mere imitation is insufficient since the poet must be endowed by nature.[17] Elsewhere the heroic poem is said to be the greatest of all the literary forms—the sea compared to which all other genres are as rivers that are lost in its immensity.[18]

Du Bellay had declared with nationalistic fervor that he hoped for a French empire which would dominate the world, and for a language worthy of such an empire. The epic would be a step in the right direction. Now, what with all this theory and ambition, one might have expected numerous attempts toward an epic and perhaps one outstanding success, but Ronsard was the only one of any reputation to try. There is little of originality in either the plan or the execution. Ronsard expressly remarks that he is like a bee in that he intends to go from flower to flower to collect honey for his hive. Accordingly one finds many passages plagiarized or paraphrased from the

[17] *L'Art Poétique,* ed. André Boulanger, Paris, 1930, in "Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg," pp. 96-7.

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 194.

old epics.[19] The work was ill-fitted to its audience, who were not sufficiently versed in Homer to recognize the ornaments culled from him, since their knowledge of " Troie la Grande " came from the romances. In short, the poem was too far removed from the general consciousness and too coldly learned to stir the common interest. Nor was there apparently the insatiable thirst for history that one finds among the Elizabethans, who devoured chronicles and mediocre historical poems with gusto.

The French theory grew out of patriotic ambition, failed to concern itself deeply with allegory, re-emphasized the essential magnitude of the heroic poem, and declared for the necessity of solid literary and historical learning in those who would regenerate all poetry, but especially the epic. The one great effort fell short and we are led to catalogue it along with the *Italia Liberata* for its patchwork clothing in borrowed passages and its lack of true inspiration. Both Ronsard and Trissino adapted themselves to the first aspect of their models and, becoming lost in the beauties by the way, lost the force of things.

IV

There are to be found in England, as in fifteenth century Italy, opposing forces of classicism and liberalism, but in England the latter were unquestionably more pronounced. Emphasis upon imitation of spirit rather than of bare forms is at least as old as Quintilian, was held by many all over Renaissance Europe, and was widespread in England. The ubiquitous desire to equal or excel the ancients is largely responsible for the attention given to the problem of imitation. The extreme humanists, of course, insisted that all composition should be done in Latin; others agreed that writing in the vernacular could best be perfected by following the example of Latin grammar. The forms of literature too, must be modeled after the classics, but the real differences of opinion become manifest when one observes that there were numerous ideas as to what really constituted the best mode of imitation. Much of the humanistic doctrine is surprisingly liberal.

[19] E. Gandar, *Ronsard Considéré comme Imitateur D'Homère et de Pindare*, Metz, 1854, p. 19.

In Spain, Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) expressed the ideal of the " vera imitatio." Unlike Erasmus and Sturm, he is enthusiastic over the capabilities of his own vernacular; significantly he rebels against the older methods of teaching grammar which assumed that rules were inviolable and not simply helpful generalizations for the use of the student. Again, he feels that if an author is worthy to be read at all, he is worthy of being studied in his completeness. He recommends Lucan as one of the earliest poets for the student to learn. His idea of the end of rhetoric is strongly reminiscent of some of the suggestions of the Pleiad, notably the proposition that nature and practice are equally essential in an author. He maintains that the study of models is necessary and that true imitation tends to develop one's individuality, not smother it. To imitate Cicero is to put oneself in his place. Cicero's method and theme are to serve as guides, but they must be followed in one's own manner. " In this way," he writes, " you become acquainted with Ciceronian rhetoric, not by directly copying him, but by entering into his spirit." [20]

Philip Melanchthon felt in common with Vives that the mere empty form of the Ciceronian oration was unimportant, warning constantly against shallowness in copying externals alone, for those who do this really do not imitate, but plunder. They are the " servum pecus imatatorum " of Horace and deserve to be shown up like the crow in Aesop's fable who dressed himself up in strange feathers.[21]

If we turn to the great German humanist, Johannes Sturm (1507-1589), we discover the same breadth of outlook. He is more significant since his influence was far greater and came when many of the features of the later Renaissance were at work. Professor Laas, in an illuminating study,[22] has outlined the vital points in Sturm's system. Imitators must not seize upon the outer form, or copy the skin only, so to speak; there must be apparent sap and strength as well: " sanguis et venae

[20] William H. Woodward, *Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance,* Cambridge, 1906, pp. 180-210. See also a German translation from Vives on Imitation in the " Pädagogische Bibliothek," vol. 16, *Ausgewählte Pädagogische Schriften,* pp. 123-9.

[21] Dr. Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Praeceptor Germaniae,* in *Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica,* Berlin, 1889, p. 343.

[22] Ernst Laas, *Die Paedagogik des Johannes Sturm,* Berlin, 1872.

et nervi atque musculorum lacerti. Libera non servilis debet esse imitatio." There must be " vehemens et artificiosa animi applicatio." His whole conception is as far as possible removed from the practice of the slavish herd of imitators. As Spingarn has remarked,[23] imitation gradually took on an almost esoteric meaning, and, as it came to be understood by most of the humanist educators, presents a striking contrast to the purely formal and uninspired concept of those like Vida, for whom the highest test of originality was no more than the clever translation of classic passages.

In England, Ascham wrote in *The Scholemaster* of imitation, but he inclines toward the stricter Ciceronians. One of the most valuable parts of the treatise is his compilation of those ancient and modern authors who had written on imitation, with his own comments upon them. This is really an annotated index which may have been used by those who wished to follow out the problem as a sort of reference, and many of the names, I suspect, became current in England through this source. Ascham mentions only Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Aristotle, Plato, and Quintilian among the ancients; whereas the moderns are represented by Erasmus, Longolius, Budé, Melanchthon, Camerarius, Bembo, Sturm, and others.

There is, however, an English tradition of liberalism in its own right from John Colet down. In some respects, Richard Mulcaster is the most significant of all English teachers and theorists, having been Spenser's instructor and also the first Master of the Merchant Tailor's School. In his *Elementarie* (1582), he avows Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian for his masters. With the Renaissance enthusiasm for individuality, he recognizes that everyone is not suited for the same development, and accordingly he proposes in his teaching to take this idea into account—to develop differences rather than insist upon a set of standardizing rules. A concept of progress and patriotism in letters also find a place in his theory. With the devotion of Du Bellay he wrote:

> I love *Rome*, but *London* better, I favour *Italie*, but England more, I honour the Latin, but I worship the *English*.

[23] *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

Sidney declared that poetry must not be forced, but rather it should gently lead. It has been seen that the humanistic " vera imitatio " contributed toward a very pronounced appreciation of originality. In Sidney the Platonic idea of inspiration, filtered through Bembo, Ficino and others, comes to the fore and unites with the former to stress the spiritual against the formal. This tendency eventually developed so far that the term " imitation " came to be applied in a deprecatory sense, notably by Chapman in his criticism of Virgil.

The early sixteenth century was little interested in poetry or in genres *per se*. If the critics speak of oratory and not of poetry, the fact need not disturb one, since from the time of Cicero at least, the two had been regarded as related professions. Then too, the emphasis upon culture of language and purity of style served to divert attention away from the structure of a work as a complete whole.

It is a commonplace to observe that English literary criticism was late in developing. It is of little consequence whether the lack of organization contributed toward a distaste for authority or whether the dislike of authority precluded standardization—they were probably interactive. This deficiency, together with general ignorance, was undoubtedly a factor in the looseness of the epic structure, but it was only one among many causes. What criticism there was, concerned itself less with the epic than any other important genre, but there are two courses charted out by this criticism: namely, the emphasis upon history as the *sine qua non* of the epic, and the laxity of rules of construction as a reason for dissimilarity to classical epics.

The terms " heroic " and " epic " had meant the same thing to the Latins and Italians; now with the Elizabethans still another word becomes synonymous—" historical." The author of *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) speaks of John Hardyng as " a Poet Epick or Historicall [who] handled himselfe well according to the time and maner of his subject." [24] In the same work, the section on the epic is devoted very largely to the historical aspect. Sidney, and Meres after him, apparently include under " heroic " shorter poems on lofty and martial themes, and the former speaks of Xenophon's account of the

[24] Bk. 1, ch. 31; in Arber's reprints, vol. 7, p. 76.

life of Cyrus as " an absolute heroical Poem." Meres euphuistically remarks: " As Homer and Vergil among the Greeks and Latins are the chief Heroic poets: so Spenser and Warner be our chief heroical makers." Webbe's *Discourse* makes only a perfunctory attempt to classify poetry into genres in our sense of the word at all. He simply points out that poetry is not debarred from any matter and may be divided into three sorts: comical, tragical, and historical. The third division, says he, may comprise all the forms not included under the other two, and specifically the " poeticall compyling of Chronicles."

An examination of the other English critics serves only to intensify the impression of a lack of literary theory, particularly as regards the epic, and this deficiency explains in part the formlessness of the epics and their acceptance as legitimate forms, but it is by no means the whole story. For the Elizabethans knew, first of all, the classical works at first hand and especially the *Aeneid*, and they were acquainted with the commentaries upon them by the Latin critics. They had completely digested Horace's *Ars Poetica*. They knew a considerable portion of Italian criticism and the Italian poems; and Scaliger enjoyed a dictatorial reputation. They also had access to the *Franciade*, whose author was personally popular in England and had been received by the Queen. One must look further, then, than academic ignorance to explain fully the peculiar English development.

If one turns from Webbe and Puttenham (?) to Harington, a different attitude becomes apparent. The latter's *Apologie*, prefaced to his translation of *Orlando Furioso* (1591), is divided into three general discussions: poetry in general, the *Orlando* in particular, and the author's translation. The first section accords closely with Sidney's arguments as to the dignity and value of poetry, and partitions the epic into the components, allegory, history, and verse; each of which is explained in the notes following each canto. The most significant part of the essay is the second part, which justifies the *Orlando* as an epic by the touchstones of Aristotle and Virgil. Harington writes:

> *Aristotle* and the best censurers of Poesie would have the *Epopeia*, that is, the heroicall Poem, should ground on some his-

torie, and take some short time in the same to beautifie with his Poetrie.

If it is true that Ariosto flies in the face of critical doctrine by breaking off narrations too abruptly and by digressing excessively in his own person, these are surely not to be held defects, but rather perfections, thinks Harington. And if a precedent is needed, he adds, then let one turn to Sidney's *Arcadia*; or if one objects that neither Homer nor Virgil wrote thus, let him remember that " it is a sufficient defense to say, *Ariosto* doth it." The same conviction is asserted in another statement:

> But now whereas some will say, *Ariosto* wanteth art, reducing all heroicall Poems unto the method of *Homer* and certaine precepts of *Aristotle*. For *Homer* I say, that which was commendable in him to write in that age, the times being changed, would be thought otherwise now, as we see both in phrase and in fashions the world growes more curious each day then other.

So much for the touchstone of the *Poetics*. The comparison with Virgil is hardly less interesting. Harington observes that Ariosto has adhered to him more strictly than to any other pattern, and by way of proof points out such comparisons as parallel passages and situations. Aeneas, for instance, is loved by Dido; Rogero by Alcina. The *Aeneid* extols Aeneas as the progenitor of the sovereign Augustus, whereas the *Orlando* exalts Rogero in order to glorify the house of Este.

Thus Harington in several respects may be considered as a summary of the leading theory and practice in England. He could easily have seen the *Worthines of Wales* and *Albions England* before publishing his own work, and may have been influenced by them as well as by the *Orlando* and the Italian apologists, Cintio, Pigna, and Torquato Tasso. His independence, his sympathy for originality and at the same time for judicious imitation of the classics, and finally his division of the epic into the components history and allegory are all typical.

It will be recalled that Webbe and Puttenham (?) agree with Tasso and Harington on this last point. This leads to an inquiry as to why in the English poems one finds so much history and so little allegory; for with the exception of the *Faerie Queene*, none of the epics are allegorical at all. This fact is perhaps their most obvious characteristic. The solution lies,

I believe, in two considerations: the widespread trust in the value of history as instruction, and the patriotic background from 1530 to 1600.

Neither of these requires much laboring. The conviction that one might best be instructed through historical example was of long standing. The *Legenda Aurea*, the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* of Boccaccio (current in England through Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*), Lydgate's *Troy Book*, Occleve's *Regement of Princes*, Gower's preface to the *Confessio Amantis*, the *Mirror for Magistrates*, and Painter's "To the Reader" of the *Palace of Pleasure* [25] are merely a few of the outstanding works in a long line from the Middle Ages to Elizabeth. Even Cicero is cited by Painter for his belief that "reading of histories [is] a certain provocation and allurement to move men to learn experience."

Sir Thomas North, in the preface to his translation of Amyot's version of Plutarch, declares that it is far better to see learning in the lives of noble men than to have virtue abstractly taught by philosophers, and that there is no profane study better than Plutarch, who has recounted the worthy actions of the greatest persons of the most famous nations of the world. Amyot, himself, goes into greater detail along the same lines.

Elyot is convinced of the benefits of history in molding the ideal governor, and recommends the reading of Silius Italicus and Lucan among others.

Puttenham (?) argues that of the potential parts of the human mind, there is none except the reason and the will more essential to the active life than memory. Out of past experiences and a comparison of them with the present, one may chart a course for the future:

> For these regards the Poesie historicall is of all other next the divine most honorable and worthy, as well as for the common benefit as for the speciall comfort every man receiveth by it. No one thing in the world with more delectation reviving our spirits then to behold as it were in a glasse the lively image of our deare forefathers, their noble and vertuous maner of life, with other things autentike, which because we are not able otherwise to attaine to the knowledge of, by any of our sences, we apprehend them by memory, whereas the present time and things so swiftly

[25] Ed. J. Jacobs, London, 1890, pp. 10-14.

passe away, as they give us no leasure almost to looke into them, and much lesse to know and consider of them throughly.

This is the true prognostication, infinitely higher than the vain and deceitful arts of soothsayers and magicians, against whom Bacon railed,[26] and whom Spenser relegated to companionship with hags, centaurs, fiends, fools, and other interesting company.[27]

Of course, not all the readers of ancient stories in the Renaissance read to be instructed, nor did the compilers or authors always write primarily to teach. They usually talk as if they did, though, and doubtless an avowed combination of pleasure and learning would tend to increase the popularity of a book. Thus do Drayton, Warner, Daniel, and Slatyer leave no doubt whatever as to their didactic intent—and very little as to their sincerity.

Thus far, history has been considered chiefly in its general application. Regarded thus, there is no distinction as to whether it relates of the English or of other nations. The fondness for native matter may be accounted for on the basis of the growing nationalism and the successful attempts of the Tudors to center attention upon the crown. There had been many historical works in both prose and verse in England, with a nationalistic bias from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* on down through Geoffrey of Monmouth and Layamon's *Brut* and John Hardyng's *Chronicle*. It appears signficant that none of these early authors make epic claims for their work—not even Hardyng. That remained for Puttenham (?) to do. The explanation lies, I believe, in the fact that those of Hardyng's day and earlier were little concerned over rivalling the classical literature of Greece and Rome. The Elizabethans decidedly were so concerned; hence any comparison on epic grounds would be welcome in order to swell the native canon, especially since Hardyng was one of the precursors of the moderns—Churchyard and Warner. Similarly in Rome, Ennius had written the *Annales*, which was accepted as epic and praised by a nation at once patriotic and eager to emulate the older and culturally superior Greeks.

Professor Comparetti has outlined Virgil's position in rela-

[26] "Of Prophecies" (1625).

[27] *Faerie Queene* 2. 9. 49-52.

tion to his time,[28] showing how the civilization and society of Homer's Greece and of Virgil's Rome were fundamentally different. It was the national aspects of the *Aeneid* which Virgil's contemporaries looked upon with particular approbation. In studying to imitate Homer, he retained the outer form of his master, but changed the spirit to harmonize with the life and aspirations of his own day. The English epic writers discarded regular epic form and, writing for a comparable society, interpreted history according to current politics. In so doing, they were following the example of the Roman poet.

It would be useless to repeat here the almost endless list of original histories and compilations that the sixteenth century produced. These, together with the accounts of voyages and the geographical works in verse and prose bear impressive witness as to the direction of a large share of the public's reading tastes. The " Society of Antiquaries " demonstrates the interest of the learned in historical research.

Of all the historical themes that were popular with the Elizabethans, two emerge predominant—the stories of British (as contrasted with Saxon) ancestry, and the final union of the houses of York and Lancaster. The former has been admirably discussed by Professor Greenlaw in his *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory*. British, and hence ultimately Trojan, origins were glorified since the Elizabethans looked upon the Tudors as derived from that ancient stock. Henry VII landing at Milford Haven was Arthur come again from Avalon, the " rex futurus." And too, he was of the " consorted seed " of the Norman and Saxon blood, from which " the crowne shall never passe away." [29]

A third theme might be mentioned, namely, the nationalism of the established Church. Roman Catholicism and Spain were regarded as identical; the supremacy of one in England entailed the supremacy of the other, with oppression and martyrdom. The continual fear of both, before and after the Armada, did much to weld Englishmen into a great and united power. Furthermore, historical research gained considerable impetus from the attempt to justify the Anglican Church as the true

[28] *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, tr. E. F. M. Benecke, London, 1895, pp. 3-14.
[29] William Warner, *Albions England*, 1602, 4. 22. p. 110.

Catholic Church. It was with this problem that the " Society of Antiquaries " was most vitally concerned from its inception. Not only was God on the side of the English banner against the Popish cross of the Armada, but history and tradition would prove that He always had been.

Less spectacular, but almost equally signficant with historical interest are the travels about England to view the scenery and the resultant accounts, frequently in verse, which almost invariably united antiquity with landscape. Topographical poetry is of ancient vintage.[30] From the little epics of Greece, the descriptive passages of long poems like the *Aeneid*, and the constant personifications of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the genre is represented in renaissance Italy by the *Eridanus* of Pontano, the *Ad Villam Margellinam* of Sannazzaro, the *Syphilis* of Fracastoro, and others. Another source of topographical symbolism is pointed out in water-festivals, lord mayors' shows, royal progresses, and masques of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The best known early occurrences of the genre in England are Leland's *Cygnea Cantio*, Camden's *De Connubia Tamis et Isis*, and William Vallans' *A Tale of Two Swannes*. It was in poems like these that Drayton found a framework suitable for clothing with patriotic and historical matter, and one, in fact, which had already been used for this very purpose, albeit in an incidental and minor fashion.

V

Lack of space renders it impossible to give a detailed analysis of the minor English epics. It seems clear that the authors of these poems, however, despite the loose form, did regard them as epics, and that contemporaries, lay and critic, accepted them as such. Certainly they had ample grounds.

Thomas Churchyard's *Worthines of Wales* (1587) at first sight is simply another topographical poem; it is a poem without hero or plot; it is episodic in structure. But it derives a unity from its avowed purpose, to eulogize the ruling house by praising its origin and history.

[30] See *Topographical Poetry in England During the Renaissance*, by Miss Hilda Taylor, abstracted in the University of Chicago *Abstracts of Theses*, " Humanistic Series," vol. 5 (1926-7), pp. 493-7.

Thus Gracious Lady [*i. e.*, Elizabeth] under your Princely favour I have undertaken to set foorth a worke in the honour of Wales, where your highnes auncestors tooke name, and where your Majestie is as much loved and feared, as in any place of your highnesse dominion.[31]

The author then suggests that the reader turn for himself to the chronicles and read of these ancestors. In a significant stanza he writes:

> Each Nation had, some writer in their daies
> For to advaunce, their Countrey to the Starres:
> *Homer* was one, who gave the *Greekes* great praise,
> And honord not, the *Troyans* for their warres.
> Livi among, the Romaines wrate right mitch,
> With rare renowne, his Countrey to enritch:
> And *Pollidore,* did ply the pen a pace,
> To blurre straunge Soyles, and yeeld the Romaines grace.[32]

It should be noted that Homer, a poet, and Livy and Polydore, historians, are grouped together, thus indicating that Churchyard considered mainly the historical aspect of the Trojan stories.

Caerleon is consciously recognized as a type of the great cities of the ancient world, long since celebrated in song and story:

> The fame of *Troy* is knowne each where,
> And to the Skyes doth mount.
>
> Both *Athens, Theabes,* and *Carthage* too
> We hold of great renowne:
> What then I pray you shall we doo,
> To poore Carleon Towne.[33]

The epic intent of Warner's *Albions England* is even clearer. Warner, following the order of the chronicles, built a poem which in many respects resembles Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The poem seems to have been intended to be complete in twelve books, in which form it was published in the fourth edition, of 1596. By this time the history has been brought up to the thirty-ninth year of Elizabeth's reign. The Trojans are said to be descended from the gods and related to the Old Testament patriarchs as well. Brute and his followers have colonized Eng-

[31] *The Worthines of Wales,* repr. Spenser Society, 1876, p. 4.
[32] *Ibid.,* p. 25.
[33] *Ibid.,* p. 30.

land, but their descendants are expelled by the Saxons, and they in their turn by the Danes. Finally come the Normans, and when foreign invaders are wanting, there are the Wars of the Roses to rend the island. Britain, however, is felt to be under the guiding hand of Providence, who unites the jarring factions and leaves the country at last in the hands of its great, rightful sovereigns and in prosperity:

> So not with *Yorke* and *Lancaster* doth wonted enuie raigne,
> Nor can *Æneas* Off-springs now of Orphansie complaine.
> But that *Cadwalladers* Fore-doomes in *Tuders* should effect
> Was vnexpected, saue that God doth destinies direct.
> . . . . . .
> Our wounded *Englands* healing balme, for thus thereof ensew'de:
> The factious Families vnite, the Tyrant was subdew'de,
> And thence the surname *Tuder* doth *Plantagenet* include.[34]

Such is the real theme of the poem: Warner has recounted the whole history of a whole race.

Warner takes great pains to identify native heroes and incidents with those of antiquity. This practice would lend dignity and heroic quality to the whole. Accordingly Voada (Boadicea) is likened to the queen of the Amazons;[35] Vortigern's passion for Buerne of Denmark and the consequent warfare remind the author of the ravishing of Helen and the destruction of Troy;[36] the civil wars against Richard II are declared to have been more savage affairs than either the struggles between Scylla and Marius or the battle of Pharsalia;[37] Henry V is called an "Achilles";[38] the English voyagers endured

> In trewer perils, and more brave Achievements, than the Tailes
> (Of Jason and Ulysses of their fabled Sea-toyld Sailes.)[39]

Warner implies a similarity to Homer when in his preface "To the Reader," he writes that he realizes that "Homer was slightly authorized in Greece," and fears that his own work may not be widely admired. That he was unduly pessimistic is indicated by Francis Meres' observation,

> As *Homer* and *Virgil* among the Greeks and Latins are the chief Heroic poets: so *Spenser* and *Warner* be our chief heroicall "makers."

[34] *Albions England,* 1602, pp. 164-6.
[35] *Ibid.,* p. 82.
[36] *Ibid.,* p. 126.
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 140.
[38] *Ibid.,* p. 143.
[39] *Ibid.,* pp. 271-2.

Anthony à Wood repeats Meres' remark that "I have heard him termed of the best wits of both our Universities, our English Homer."

Daniel's *Civill Warres* is an outstanding example of the use of history in a heroic poem for purposes frankly didactic. Let it be carefully noted that the history is authentic and for the most part ungarnished. Like Warner, Daniel follows the chronicle method, observing chronological order. All this and a comparable historical situation, he found in his model, Lucan's *Pharsalia*. The *Civill Warres* is much more limited in scope than *Albions England,* being concerned with only one great action. It opens with a brief synopsis of the rulers from William the Conqueror, but the story proper begins with Richard II on the throne. It continues through successive pictures of deposition, murder, conspiracy, and revolt to the victory of Edward and the re-establishment of the Yorkist line. The purpose is to paint the horrors of rebellion in such bloody colors that no one will dare to revolt again,[40] for even the most unjust peace is to be preferred to the justest war.

The poem remains incomplete, but was to have been continued until the reign of Henry VII, the first of the Tudor dynasty, whose ascendency and national fortunes are, he thinks, one and the same.

Epic breadth and dignity are secured by the sustained tone of high seriousness, the magnitude of the action, and by such minor devices as occasional extended similes and parallels between modern and ancient story. The most striking similes are those of the Colossus, the mastiff whelp, the owl, the inundation, and the Libyan lion,[41] in part garnered from Lucan. Daniel mentions Helen's part in the Trojan war along with Henry VI's French wife, who caused so much trouble in England; an English Pompey and Caesar were leaders in the fight at Towton, which he thinks was a more stupendous conflict than Pharsalia.

With Michael Drayton we come upon one of greater poetic genius, and one strongly affected by liberalism and Platonism. Contemptuous of the fine distinctions of some of the profes-

[40] See particularly 1. 1, 107; 2. 117; 3. 53-4; 6. 1-2; 7. 98; 8. 6.
[41] See 2. 6, 11, 100; 3. 4; 7. 96.

sional critics, he invariably contributed something new to his originals and was concerned more deeply with the infusion of the spirit than with copying the form of his model. The shorter poems, the *Heroical Epistles*, and the *Legends* all have epic characteristics, but the most interesting of Drayton's poems is *Poly-Olbion*.

Poly-Olbion unites the topographical poem and the epic. The title-page, Drayton's introduction, and Selden's foreword all speak of the work as both geography and history. The text bears this out. All Wales and England is included in the itinerary. Starting in Cornwall and the Channel Islands, the Muse proceeds along the southern tier of counties, works gradually northward into the Midlands, and finishes her journey in Cumberland and Westmoreland. The geographical descriptions, as a rule, seem dull and uninspired in comparison with the historical matter which, I believe with Professor Greenlaw,[42] gives the poem what vitality it possesses. Historical subjects had always attracted Drayton, he was well acquainted with the chronicles, and he was something of an antiquary in his own right, being a member of a learned society founded early in the seventeenth century. The spirit of sentimental primitivism was stronger in him than in any of the authors thus far considered, so it is not to be wondered at that the epic spirit pervading the work seems vastly of more account than the somewhat perfunctory topography.

This point was recognized by contemporary men of letters. Drummond, Drayton's intimate friend who aided him in finding a publisher, refers to it as the only epic, in his opinion, of which England has to be proud.[43] William Slatyer mentions Drayton as the English Virgil, in some commendatory verses to his own *Palae-Albion*. William Browne of Tavistock implies a comparison with Ovid, Virgil, and Homer.[44] George Wither speaks of the poem as " heroic " when he warns the author,

> Yet, overmuch presume not, that these *Times*,
> Will therefore value thy Heroick *Rymes*,
> According to their Merit.[45]

[42] *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory*, p. 31.
[43] David Masson, *Life of William Drummond*, 1873, p. 84.
[44] " To My Honor'd Friend Mr. Drayton," prefaced to the last twelve songs, 1622.
[45] " To his Noble Friend, Michael Drayton, Esquire upon his Topo-chronographicall Poeme," in the 1622 ed. of *Poly-Olbion*.

The verse of the poem is alexandrine, which form had been recommended by Ronsard for the heroic poem, and which he considered to be the modern equivalent of the classical hexameter. Second, there is the purely external matter of great length, which is usually associated with the epic. Third, the poem is divided into songs or cantos. Fourth, the similes and catalogues are reminiscent of the epic poem. The former,[46] while not particularly frequent, contribute to the lofty style which the decorum of the epic demands. The latter are numerous and elaborate. The catalogues of ships and the blazons of the shires in the *Battaile of Agincourt* were praised by Ben Jonson as superior to similar ones in Homer, but as a matter of fact those in *Poly-Olbion* are still more striking. They range in style from the relatively simple lists of musical instruments (iv), waterfowl, fishes and land birds (xxv) to the much longer and fully descriptive catalogues of British kings after Brute (viii), the blazons of the shires (xxiii), and the English warriors (xviii). In fact, the structure of the poem as a whole may be largely accounted for by the employment of this device; in several cases, whole songs are given over to it entirely. Song xix gives a résumé of all the English seamen, and song xxiv relates the deeds of the English Saints. Fifth, there are comparisons between Britain and the classical world; for instance, Lemster (Leominster) wool is like the Golden Fleece, the invading Danes came like Greeks out of the Wooden Horse, and Salisbury fought at Harflew (Harfleur) like a god descending to the " seige of high-rear'd Ilion." [47] Finally, the poem is dedicated to the scion of the ruling Stuart family, Henry Prince of Wales, in *1613*, and after his death to Prince Charles.

Poly-Olbion takes all English history for its province. With the completeness of a chronicle it covers the entire field from Troy to modern times. Trojan ancestry, the nobility of the Britons, and the genealogy of the Tudors all recur again and again, but since James is now on the throne, Drayton goes a step further than Warner did. He accounts for the connection between the Britons, the Saxons, and the Scottish royal line in songs iv and v, and the union of all these with the Norman line.

[46] Note, for example in *1613*: 12, pp. 201, 202; in *1622*: 20, p. 43; 22, p. 47; 26, p. 117; 28, p. 146.

[47] These passages respectively: 7, p. 104; 12, p. 203; 18, p. 292.

Local beliefs, peculiarities, and legends are interwoven with the great national events. Corineus, Gogmagog, Merlin, Madoc, Joseph of Arimathea, and Robin Hood march side by side in the pageant of England's greatness. Landscape and history conjoin to produce an epic which answered to the spirit that in France had demanded " un long poëme Françoys," to the Italian belief that the epic was all-embracing, and to the English desire for a national background no less noble than that of Troy and Rome and to her conviction that her present rulers incarnated the ancient tradition.

Aesthetically speaking, William Slatyer's *History of Great Britanie,* or as he pleased to call it *Palae-Albion,* is anti-climax, but it represents so completely many of the tendencies previously discussed that it is a fitting culmination for this study. The preface evidences an undiminished respect for the instructive value of history and goes on to lament the fact that men have grown to prefer foreign stories to native ones:

> We better skill the warres of *Troy* and *Thebes,* with the *Pharsalian* fields, the halfe-feyned fights of *Hercules, Achilles, Turnus, Hector,* and *Æneas,* (I will not say of *Amadis, Don Quixot,* and such like) then as Heroike, if not more warlike, and worthy to be renowned martiall spirits of our owne; *Danes, Saxons, Romans, Normans, Brittons,* and other noble Captaynes here at home; the great *Britannicus Caesars, Cassivelane, Guider, Hengist, Arthur, Egbert, Rollo, Alfred, Marcia's, Elfled's,* and their equalls, as truely glorious and worthy Wights, in this our Sea-encompast little *Bryttaine*-World, as ever were those halfe-deified and Pagan-sainted *Heroes,* of whose acts *Homer* and *Hesiods,* the *Mantuan* and *Theban* Poets layes, in that so famous and triumphant-wise resound!

In the defence of poetical history with which the second ode opens, he returns to the same theme and implies that he will emulate Ennius and Homer by recording the deeds of native heroes and the genealogy of the present race.

Structurally the poem follows chronological order and is divided into the books or odes, entitled in order as follows: Samothes, Albion, Giants, Brute, Mulmutius, Caesar, Hengist, Sweno, Gulielmus, and Jacobus. It is dedicated to James in these verses which mark out the theme:

> Great *Brytaines* King, sprong from great'st wights;
> Who claym'st just right, in all their rights,
> From *Japhet's* sonnes first, comes thy Grace,

As all our Northerne peoples Race!
And as for *Albion* his intrusion,
And *Cham*-bred Giants fell confusion,
Disclayme it. All the rest of them,
That e're wore *Englands* Diadem,
Danes, Saxons, Brittish, Romans came,
With *Normans* Armes and Teudor's Name,
Deriv'd to thee, whom Scotlands Throne
With all her Iles, calls her deare owne.

Thirty years earlier, Slatyer would probably have been numbered among England's literary leaders; as it was, his labors passed almost entirely unnoticed, and the present day does not find even his name listed in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.

Conclusion

In the Renaissance there are two main divergent types of epics. Obviously subject to correction, they may for convenience be divided into "formal" and "liberal." The formal epics were based upon the form of Homer or Virgil and relied heavily upon neo-Aristotelian theories. They had a hero, sometimes a type of Aeneas; they were nearly always allegorical; their matter was legendary; and there was much supernatural intervention. In all there was emphasis upon the construction of the story as such, for Aristotle had observed that the important thing was the fable, which should be neither too short nor too long, should have a beginning, middle, and end, and might relate things as they are, as they are reported to be, or as they ought to be. The action, he thought, should be a complete whole. Horace preferred the epic poem to begin "in medias res." All these "rules" and traditions with many elaborations were current in Renaissance criticism. We may take Trissino, Tasso, Ronsard, and Blackmore as types of formal epic authors.

Opposed to these, there is, particularly in England, a sort of epic with fundamentally different structural characteristics. These poems are unified by a theme instead of a hero; they depend upon history instead of allegory for their ethical instruction, and mainly upon history which their authors considered to be authentic; they are learned and nearly always accompanied by annotations; they are cumulative and frequently attempt to cover all English history in a single poem; they

never begin " in medias res " and usually follow the strict temporal order of the chronicles; they are sometimes combined with the form of another genre.

As epics they are patriotic in intent, tracing the background of the present race and the ancestry of the ruling family. The British are generally upheld in preference to the Saxons, although all the racial components are recognized as possessing attributes of nobility. In the accession of the Tudors (and later, the Stuarts), the throne is held to have returned to its rightful monarchs, the offspring of Troy, and to typify the union of previous warring factions, particularly those of York and Lancaster. In this manner, history assumes a direct contemporary significance, comparable to that of the *Aeneid* in its exaltation of the emperor Augustus. There is a feeling that English heroes and events are no less remarkable than those of the ancient world as related by Homer, Ennius, or Virgil, and no opportunity is overlooked to point out the comparisons between them. In all these ways did Renaissance England reproduce the spirit of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, albeit in a different form.

These peculiar deviations from normal epic practice have been accounted for in several ways:

1. The classical background.
2. The Renaissance critical background.
3. The humanistic ideal of imitation.
4. The taste for history.
5. Native English critical theory.
6. Platonism.
7. The Renaissance spirit of independence.

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VITA

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